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ABSTRACT

The author reviews the history of education in America from the 1950s when plenty of money and public support for the schools was available, through the late 1970s when Americans no longer have complete faith in education as the means of solving social problems and when resources are increasingly scarce. Given the course of the last two decades, James Conant's optimistic predictions that the educational system could be all things to all people seems naive. Schools are the focal points--the places where national social concerns and policies are acted out. The result has been that while the school was used as a stage to play out great conflicts deriving from the culture, little attention has been given to educational issues. Educators have continued to operate much as they always have. The author does not expect the educational system to change much in the immediate future, and he anticipates that schools will continue to reflect cultural concerns. (DS)

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Trends in Education

Before Conant, Beyond Jencks

by

Harry L. Summerfield



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In 1959, James B. Conant, the distinguished former President of Harvard University, published The American High School Today, a widely distributed book acclaimed as an authoritative pronouncement on the state of American education.¹ No longer read, it now stands as—perhaps—the least prescient bit of pedagogical-social commentary in print. In his book Conant politely asked, "Can a school at one and the same time provide a good general education for all the pupils as future citizens of a democracy, provide elective programs for the majority to develop useful skills, and educate adequately those with a talent for handling advanced subjects?" "Yes," he declared. The public school system, culminating in the high school, could, like the Church before Luther, accommodate all youth and successfully provide a rite of passage into productive roles in the economy or into further training—higher education—which would later lead to productive roles.

Reading Conant at the end of the 1970's is slightly amusing. One's mouth forms a weak smile followed by a subdued chuckle for the distinguished man both wrong and irrelevant. He did not have a hint of the right questions to ask or of what was "blowin' in the wind." Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Fritz Perls, Robert McNamara, Benjamin Spock, dope, race, war, sex, crime, pollution, Kennedy-King-Kennedy, Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, Julius Hoffman, Mario Savio, Albert Shanker. Yes, Albert Shanker! But, how could Conant have known? He looked to the past, the 1950's, in order to assess the future.

In the 1950's, education, like automobiles, enjoyed an expansion of *materiel* and support. New schools rose to house the baby boom, teacher shortages called for heroic efforts by universities to expand departments of education. Schools were elevated to the status of sanctified secular agencies of temporal salvation—salvation through the vision of material consumption.

As the cold war convoluted into McCarthyism, schools acquired the function of inculcating patriotism and ideological purity—the loyalty oath at the university, patriotism, fear of being "nuked," and anti-Communism in the schools.² The task assumed a solemnity with Sputnik in 1957.³ A flurry of nervous, public criticism assigned blame for Russia's alleged superiority in space to lackadaisical and overly

permissive American education. The nation's military security seemed to depend on the schools, and the schools were letting us all down. Educators responded by demanding more attention to the "solid" subjects—math, science, and foreign languages. They rallied the public to say that, indeed, the schools are the answer to America's problems and that we need more and more disciplined education. We must support the schools with greater zeal in order to save the nation.⁴

In 1958, the Congress responded to the criticism by supporting the schools with the National Defense Education Act, a law providing money to raise the quality of American education, particularly for the brightest children.⁵

Support for the schools was complete when incorporated into the unquestioned myth that education was the bulwark of the American economy, and education accounted above all else as a causal factor in achieving personal upward social and economic mobility. Getting education and getting richer were seen as inextricable.

It was in the above context in which Conant wrote and his views were widely shared. The over 20,000 governmental units which were school districts enjoyed a politics of quiescence based upon a general public satisfaction that schools, as indispensable institutions, fulfilled needs of society, and where failures occurred, more support should be generated.

Even throughout the 1960's, mass public support for schools did not change in America. According to the Gallup Poll of 1967, 71% of Americans believed that public schools were doing a good job of preparing children for the future.⁶ (Although 19% thought schools did a poor job, it is interesting to note that only 48% thought that parents did a good job of preparing children for the future and 39% thought parents did a poor job!) By 1970, the end of the decade, a Harris Poll showed that only 8% thought that school quality was poor.⁷ Whatever else caused issues in education during the decade of the 60's, little of the conflict was based on fundamental doubt by most citizens about the goals and quality of American schooling.

Conant was wrong about the American schools because he was irrelevant. He did not foresee the powerful shifts in American culture, that schools, as passive cultural institutions, were used in the cultural shifts.

And, shifts there were. Inch by inch, hair-length fell in the 1960's. The high schools which Conant thought so stable faced sex (to be met by sex education), drugs (to be met by drug abuse education) and disinterest (to be met by the loss of faith in his sacred curriculum and an emergence of a new narcissism). A joint was a thing one smoked, not a place to go have a Coke, and in sophisticated circles, coke was snorted, not sipped. Symbols of defiance supplanted superego by id, confirmed Bob Dylan's intonation:

Mothers and fathers throughout the land
 Don't criticize what you don't understand
 Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command...
 For the times, they are a - changin'.⁸

Perhaps the shift from Conant to Dylan is better illustrated in the writing of Norman Mailer, the American novelist who spanned the two epochs, not always with grace, but with a sure eye. A comparison of his writing published in 1948 with his work in 1968 vividly testifies to changing values toward authority.

Set in the World War II South Pacific army, in The Naked and The Dead, Mailer captures the Post War's vital theme. This excerpt, from a conversation between the paternalistic and self-assured General Cummings—and the young, confused, and naive Lt. Hearn:

General Cummings:

"I've been trying to impress you, Robert, that the only morality of the future is a power morality, and a man who cannot find his adjustment to it is doomed. There's one thing about power. It can flow only from the top down. Where there are little surges of resistance at the middle levels, it merely calls for more power to be directed downward, to burn it out." Hearn was looking at his hands. "We're not in the future yet."
 "You can consider the Army, Robert, as a preview of the future."⁹

General Cummings' vision of authority retained its sanctity and power until the 1960's. Mailer, in 1968, twenty years after he gave us General Cummings, stands outside the Pentagon documenting the downfall of both the spirit of the General and of the Post-War myth. There is no Lt. Hearn listening nervously. Instead Mailer says of the youth assembled to protest Vietnam:

Their radicalism was in their hate for the authority—the authority was manifest of evil to this generation. It was the authority who had covered the land with those suburbs where they stifled as children while watching the adventures of the West in the movies, while looking at the guardians of dull genial celebrity on television; they had had their minds jabbed and poked and twitched and probed and finally galvanized into surrealistic modes of response by commercials cutting into dramatic narratives, and parents flipping from network to network.... The authority had operated on their brain with commercials, and washed their brain with packaged education,

packaged politics. The authority had presented itself as honorable and it was corrupt, corrupt as payola on television, and scandals concerning the safety of automobiles....
 Finally, this new generation of the Left hated the authority, because the authority lied....¹⁰

This spirit of liberated youth found political expression in education because of forced confrontation and breakdown of school traditions, and, thus, in goals of education. Beginning on the campus with a struggle over Mario Savio's right to speak profanity, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement transformed into riots which spread to Columbia and ended in bloodshed at Kent State. In elementary and secondary education a group known as the "romantic reformers" of education, published widely, particularly in the New York Review of Books. They argued variations on the theme that "traditional" schooling—schooling based on disciplined, competitive, graded classrooms, where the teacher teaches the entire class as group—caused damage to the spirit, creativity, and dignity of the child. John Holt, Jonathan Kozol, Paul Goodman, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Jules Henry, and others chastised American schooling not for its failures but for its ability to inculcate values and psychological characteristics in children which, they said, constrained individual freedom.¹¹

This movement reached a popular height with the publication in 1970 of Crisis in the Classroom by journalist Charles Silberman. The Carnegie Corporation, which had financed Conant a decade before, funded Silberman. But the latter's book was anything but confirmation of the condition of the schools. Silberman fulminated against traditional teaching and argued passionately for the "open classroom."¹² This concept retained the classroom as the basic unit of the school but emphasized encouraging children to proceed at work at their own pace in a manner and on subjects ostensibly of their choosing. The open classroom philosophy placed high value on the affective atmosphere, and this emphasis on "feelings" led in some school districts to more exaggerated versions of the open classroom where emphasis was entirely on "affective education." As a part of the often anti-intellectual curriculum, attempts were made to teach children how to experience feelings.

By the mid 1970's the big fuss had begun to settle. Tom Hayden wearing a pin striped suit, was running for the US Senate in California and condemning radicalism; a rock music promoter was offering an enormous amount of money to try to get the Beatles together again to play a sentimental concert, and "the mothers and fathers throughout the land" which Bob Dylan had condemned now included himself and most of his onetime audience.

Education looked strangely as it did in the 1950's. College students were quiet and ambitious. Elementary schools were in general a bit less authoritarian, but were still teaching reading writing and arithmetic and struggling to maintain order. The "open classroom," for all its hoopla,

was "perfumed pedagogy" designed to adjust the same old school to what many viewed as the less obedient children raised in the more permissive post-war manner.*

It was in the high school, so cherished by Conant, where school life, curriculum, and youthful attitudes seemed to be the greatest mutual misfits. But, it is not at all certain that conditions had changed there either. Institutionalized adolescents were a problem before and after Conant.

The 1950's produced "Blackboard Jungle" as a cinematic expression of conflict in schools, and while perhaps the 1960's and 1970's would retitl it Blackboard Junkie, both are hyperbole. Since leaving the farm, Americans, skittish about child labor, have never known what to do with their adolescents. "Educating" them seemed to be the most convenient and cheapest solution.

Finally, like the era of the 1950's, the 1970's held firm to the myth that more education for more people was a good thing, but the emphasis in education shifted from the high school to public higher education of the citizenry.

Civil Rights - Equality and Opportunity

The hope and promise for more and better education swept the middle class white culture, but veritabily inspired the long-neglected and disadvantaged Black population. "I have a dream..." rose the voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., the voice of the American conscience.

In 1954 the Supreme Court found "separate schools inherently unequal" in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.¹³ The court declared that Black and white children must attend school together. Integrationists, in the early period, were convinced that Black children would thereby get a better education and then come to have their fair share of the American bounty.

At first only the eleven states of the Old Confederacy were affected because they had established *de jure*, that is, in law, restrictions on mixing of the races in schools. Northerners looked on rightously. They had no such laws. Desegregation proceeded in the South with bitterness. The great adversaries were the Southern state legislatures and governors on the one side and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, the Departments of Justice and Health Education and Welfare on the other. Despite the resistance on the other, Southern institutions could not maintain segregation against federal power. And, in fact,

*The apt term, "perfumed pedagogy" was given to me by Professor Edgar Gumbert, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

by the end of the 1960's the Southern schools had less racial isolation than the North.¹⁴

The North did not escape racial strife, and the relationship between race and schools in Northern cities seems to have had a most profound effect on America's urban demography. Racial isolation in the North was *de facto* without the force of law, but it was no less real. Segregation evolved because of the free choice housing patterns of citizens. America fell into the throes of a great migratory shift. As Blacks moved into older housing in central cities, whites moved out. A school which reached about 40 percent Black in one year might be nearly 100 percent Black the next year.¹⁵ Throughout the conflict the proportion of Blacks in public schools in large cities actually increased dramatically throughout the decade. By 1970 there were 97 percent Blacks in the Washington, D.C. schools; Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, St. Louis, and many other cities had from 40 to 70 percent Black children mostly enrolled in schools which were all Black or all white.

The unwillingness of American whites to accept integration was evident from migratory patterns, but it received a surprising confirmation in the 1972 Michigan presidential primary. Alabama Governor George Wallace, running on a ticket opposing the bussing of children to obtain racial balance, won a credible victory.

All white groups were not willing to migrate. For example, in 1975 there was violence in the streets of Boston's South End as white "Southies" refused to obey court orders which now required bussing for racial balance in that Northern city. Southies would not be bussed and could not—or would not—move from their old established homes and neighborhoods. They literally stood their ground and fought. In cities like San Francisco and Atlanta, the white school population disappeared in large numbers.

The fact remained that after attempts at integrating schools in the North, racial isolation was greater than it ever had been, and the demographic balance of urban America had been even more profoundly segregated on the basis of race and family income.

Segregation-desegregation was only one aspect of the role of the school in changing the condition of economically disadvantaged children—particularly Blacks. Raising the social and economic status of poor people and particularly millions of Blacks became a key plank in the legislative program of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.¹⁶ In the American mythology, schools have long been held to be the channel of passage from lower to middle class status. If people were poor, so went the argument, it was because they were not equipped with the knowledge or the skills sufficient to compete in the American economy. And, the facts were becoming available: Blacks throughout the nation scored in the average of one standard deviation below whites in reading scores. (Other minorities, excluding orientals, like Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Native American Indians scored similarly.¹⁷)

Although the Manpower Development Training Act and the 1963 Vocational Education Amendments sought to upgrade poor people economically by assuming that they lacked skills for employment and that skill training would make them eligible for jobs, the public schools came to focus on the "basic skills." Reformers of the early sixties assumed that poor people were poor because as young school children they did not develop facility with reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1965, with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, millions of federal dollars were authorized to be spent for the "compensatory education" of the poor, especially through Title I.¹⁸ It became the policy of the Federal government to purchase extra educational services for poor children in order to compensate for their schooling deficiencies.

Title I was imbued with idealism motivated perhaps by the New Deal success of the liberal labor movement in winning middle-class status for its members in the 1930's and perhaps by such dramatically successful governmental efforts like the Manhattan Project. The federal effort relied on the hope that government dollars could purchase "programs" which would change the lives of poor people. Across the country at the local level with Federal funding, what seemed like thousands of experimental programs designed to increase Black reading scores were created by schoolmen, college professors, and industry. It was new enthusiasm for an old formula—compensate for schooling failure with more schooling.

The rhetoric of national leaders and heightened aspirations of community residents led to increasing expectations for educational growth and subsequent economic mobility. But, a pall fell. Black reading scores did not improve.¹⁹

At first only a handful of intellectuals and political officials read the "Coleman Report."²⁰ Published in 1966, at the same time the compensatory education movement was getting underway, Chapter III of the report, written by Professor James Coleman, outlined several confusing revelations.

Liberals in the Johnson Administration and in Congress had operated on two assumptions: First, that Black education was unequal because not enough (and not equal amounts) of state and local money were spent on Blacks. Second, they assumed that if enough money were allocated and enough new programs were initiated, then the dollars which bought the programs would in fact be able to purchase equality of educational opportunity.

However, the Coleman findings profoundly contradicted the liberal conventional wisdom. He found first that the amount of dollars spent on Blacks was not highly disproportionate to the amount spent on whites, and no vicious pattern of unequal dollar expenditures seemed pervasive. Most of the differential-in-dollar expenditures could be explained because either Blacks lived in poor, rural school districts or because the teachers in Black schools tended to have fewer years of experience and thus had lower salaries than teachers in white schools. Most large cities' teachers with more years in the system could choose their school when openings occurred and, thus, tended to move out of the Black schools to "nice" middle class settings.

Coleman's other findings proved more dramatic because they countered the prospect that the school could be engineered into a social institution sufficiently powerful to change the culture of the poor. He found that there is only a "small independent effect of variations in school facilities, curriculum, and staff upon achievement."²¹ That is, the influence of schools on changing the cognitive achievement of the child is not increased by differences in qualities of the school. A student is likely to do about as well on reading and arithmetic regardless of the particular qualities of a particular schoolhouse.

Coleman sought to explain differences in school achievement in terms of "the great importance of family background" to the child's cognitive development.²² Children of economically more advantaged families do better in school and "the relation of family background to achievement does not diminish over the years of school."²³ Indeed, the gap between Blacks and whites tends to increase over the twelve years of schooling. The effects of schooling do not overcome the relative inequality of educational achievement between Blacks and whites as measured by standardized achievement tests.

NOTE: Coleman is not saying, as is sometimes popularly thought, that "schools do not make a difference" in the lives of children. He does not mean that Black children do not benefit from schooling. Coleman's point is that, on the average, Black children (and others) do not perform basic skill tasks as well as white children; however, they do learn to read, write, and count, and to perform well on a myriad of other unmeasured phenomena.

One of Coleman's positive findings which, in retrospect, appears as an insignificant fragment became vital rhetoric for the then US Commissioner of Education, Harold Howe II, and it seemed to give heart to the press for racial integration. Coleman found that if Black children attended school with more than 50% white children for their entire school career, than Blacks did "significantly" better than they would have done had they attended schools which were less than 50% white. To Howe and others who had committed their term in office to the attainment of racial desegregation, the "significant" findings served as data to show that there were sound educational grounds in addition to constitutional grounds to speed up the process of desegregation.

The term, "significant," used in its popular connotation by public officials, in fact was a technical term from the field of statistics. Statistical significance means that the findings are not a product of chance and that 95 times out of a hundred or even greater the findings that Blacks did better in schools which were better than 50% white would hold true. The point obscured in the pronouncements of Howe and others was that the amount of gain that accrued to Blacks, while statistically "significant," was so small that it did not amount to more than few months gain in reading score over a twelve year period in school. Blacks attending desegregated schools still remained almost one standard deviation behind whites.

Liberal hopes were to face even another deflation with the publication in 1972 of Inequality.²⁴ The authors, led by Harvard sociologist Christopher Jencks, reanalyzed the Coleman data and discovered that Coleman was essentially correct—in fact, he may have underestimated the amount of difference between Black and white scores. The Jencks team went on to examine the myth at the heart of American schooling. They found that even if school achievement were equal, it would be a poor predictor of the income a child is likely to earn when he or she enters the economy. Men who have high academic ability also have an economic status which averages only a small distance from the status of men with low academic ability. Noting that genetic mental ability as measured by IQ is highly related to school achievement, Jencks wrote:

The most genetically advantaged fifth of all men appear to have incomes about 35 to 40 percent higher than the most genetically disadvantaged fifth. In a society where the best paid fifth of all men earn 600% more income than the worst paid fifth, disparities of this magnitude are not very significant. The point is even clearer if we estimate the degree of income inequality between individuals with exactly the same IQ genotype. Our best estimate is that we would find only about 3% less income inequality in genetically homogenous sub-populations than in the entire American population.²⁵

Even family background, which is a good predictor of school achievement among children, is a poor predictor of later income. Jencks notes, for example, that the estimate of the average income differential of brothers raised in the same family is large, about \$5,000.²⁶

In order for schooling to have a differential social and economic impact, an increase in a pupil's school achievement would have to translate into an increase in an adult's socio-economic status within the larger society. However, the relationship of school achievement to future status appears too weak to be relied upon to produce profound social change for either the individual or the society as a whole. Thus, the liberal dream of using the schools as a vehicle for obtaining social and economic equality of opportunity crumbled on the dual obstacles of the inability of the school to create conditions for equality of achievement and the marginal utility of school achievement for obtaining social mobility. In any event, enthusiasm for using the schools as vehicle for social reform waned among the intellectual elite in universities and government.

Fiscal Problems

In the 1960's operating expenses of schools soared as a direct function of increased teacher's salaries. (About 85% of every education dollar goes to teacher's salaries and benefits.) In the decade 1962-1972 the general cost of education across the nation increased about 138% from \$433 per pupil in Average Daily Attendance to \$1,035 per pupil.²⁷ Although rationales about the rising cost of education are varied, the issue of education cost during this period is best viewed as a power struggle on a labor matter.

Until the 1960's teachers were polite and relatively passive about salary issues. Teacher organizations restrained their salary demands, and, thus, matched their salary expectations with the amount of public resources customarily made available. In turn, dollar appropriations for education came easily. The axe fell first in New York City. Led by their union leader, Albert Shanker, the city teachers struck for higher wages. Before long, big city and suburban school districts regularly engaged in "professional negotiations" (the teacher euphemism for collective bargaining). Teacher organizations became powerful lobbies in state legislatures and in Washington, and annual conflict over salary negotiations became a major burden of school board-administrative policy making.²⁸

In the 1970's the problem was exacerbated. School enrollments were declining, and so districts received less money from the state; yet not only did teacher salary demands remain vigorous, but also declining enrollments meant that school districts were employing more teachers than they needed. This unintended featherbedding became expensive, and tax dollars were less available. Inflation also caused spiraling school district costs and cut into the will of even the affluent suburbs to support increased revenue for their schools. School districts stopped hiring new people; in fact, they tried to lay off some employees, and many college graduates found that they had no profession to practice. The great education boom had ended, at least temporarily, and the permanent employees were settled in for annual battles to increase their salaries.

Instead of the rhetoric of more and better education, the political controversies centered on how to lower the costs. Educators, in their inimitable way of creating trends, responded to the "accountability" movement.^{29,30} Because educational research could show rather definitively that extra dollars spent on education had a negligible relationship to an increase in achievement test scores, and because the dollars were no longer readily available, legislators, embracing accountability, could try to argue against increased dollar appropriations on the seemingly rational grounds that no additional public service was rendered. Attempts at new management techniques—management by objectives, as an example, became a fad. Systems analysts, trying to apply methods developed by the government for putting men on the moon and for fighting the Vietnam war, tried to put some efficiency and effectiveness into education.

By the late 1970's it was evident that somehow the school systems barely flinched under the new technology and rhetoric. In the final analysis, costs remained attached to teacher salaries; teachers were becoming more powerful; and salaries were going up. No machine or systems analyst could supplant the basic unit of teacher and child. If teachers could not teach some children to read, neither could any other technique. School administrators continued to be concerned with day-to-day routine and teachers were in classrooms with the kids. For a moment, there was a fantasy that Eisenhower was back in the White House. *Deja vu.*

Reflections

The hopes and fears of citizens, projected into the public institution of the school, is the source of most educational tumult. When Russia appeared to be an imminent threat, schools became a bastion of national defense. When racial injustice burned in the hearts of citizens, the school became the turf for exercising conscience. When social equality had a moment of breath during the liberal years of the 1960's, schools were the most accessible institutions within which to conduct the experiment. All of these phenomena arise from shifts in power and patterns within the American culture. Schools, like good dramatic creations, reflect the culture, but do not often create it.

While serving as a stage for the representation of profound cultural conflicts, schools, in their actual operation, seem to remain mostly unchanged. The school has a substantial life of its own, and the shifting fads of American culture do not change the fact that on a day-to-day basis the teacher and his/her curriculum constitute an authority whose challenges pupils attempt to master. It is the curriculum which is integrated wholly into the American culture, but throughout all the strife, there has been very little substantial conflict over fundamental curriculum, athletics, and other long durable items. Thus, the school, used as a stage to play out great conflicts deriving from the culture, faced few great conflicts based upon its own essential structure and content.

But there are fundamental educational issues. They are not war, race, poverty, and revolution. They concern the goals of schooling and the subsequent patterns of relationships which any individual child forms with and as a result of the structure of schooling. It is certain that social adaptation is a fundamental goal of schooling. However, a yet unresolved issue is whether along with social adaptation, concern for individual development is also the primary goal.

Each child is separate and uniquely equipped. The harshest regimentation or most subtle persuasion to submission does not erase that fact. Each individual as well longs to be unified with his/her universe while s/he experiences that unification as an autonomous

being. Individuality and unification are part of the same fabric and exaggerating one while diminishing the other is a distortion of life. The problems of education pose the question: How does the individual differentiate his/her personality in order to see his/her self and world in increasingly complex ways? How does one integrate this knowledge in one's own mind so that his psychic and social sense of unity is satisfied and one's joy in life is maximized? How can the school serve to foster the autonomous development of the pupil so that social role and intrapsychic self are in harmony?

These are kinds of questions which inspired Thomas Jefferson, who recognized that the approach to these questions are the legitimate domain of the school. Schools are not equipped to solve the problems often projected onto them which were created by long standing adult hates, fears and obsessions. Schools can, however, foster growth.

Respect for the individual, understanding of his conscious and unconscious thought, concern for his growth, utilization of his curiosity and creativity, recognition that his feelings and his rational thoughts are integrated units of *homo sapiens* expression—all these notions, not much more modern than Jefferson, derive from loving concern for the development of the pulsating protoplasm, the mystery of human life.

These notions, however, have not become part of the modern history of educational ideas and conflicts and are not the basis of policy problems which have concerned educational administrators. Conflict in education has not centered on the problems of the human being as an individual in the process of growth. It seems that the conflict has been avoided in part by the self-assured embracing of Skinnerian psychology—beyond freedom and dignity—and organization theory which dominates the school. The child is offered a skewed opportunity for development. S/he can conform to authoritative expectations, learn to like it, and not know the difference. While all this is going on, barely under the control of consciousness, administrators tend to the pressing matters of keeping the institutions maintained and running. The human issues do not go away. They are real enough, but they are not made to be the central issues.³¹

Were I to make the same mistakes as James Conant and try to predict the future of education in American, I too would probably discover that I had spilled soup on my starched shirt. I cannot say what the future issues to American education will be because that would require knowledge of what the cultural shifts will begin to be projected onto the school. If, amidst the memory traces of Watergate and the atrocities of the 1960's, American culture shifts toward resurgence of human dignity for individuals, then schools shall perhaps be given the chance to explore individual development—what it is they are best equipped to do.

My hypothesis about the coming decades is somewhat more pessimistic however. The murders of beloved leaders, murders of innocent children, destruction of natural beauty, vulgarity of political corruption, and the disappointment and perpetual insecurity of materialism, all evident by the end of the 1970's, must have an effect on the masses of Americans. All of these memories are difficult to accept; they are, therefore, denied and repressed. This repression bodes the possibility that guilt stands to be the great motivator for many people in the 1980's. Guilt is not the basis of individualization. It is the basis of authoritarianism, the desire to submit to leaders who absolve guilt and in return receive submission. In such a culture schools would not foster autonomy. In short, schools would not change much.

If this pessimistic view prevails, then we can be assured that a trough of self-destruction will be reached somewhere in the search for absolution from guilt and a new surge toward dignity will arise. If our culture spirals downward, it may not be until the turn of the century when another Martin Luther King, Jr., or Jefferson has a moment or more. If, in the 1980's, the schools are denied a chance to experiment with fostering human dignity, perhaps, if we are patient and can survive our own disgrace, dignity's time will come. The schools no doubt will still be with us and ready to permit the culture to project its values.

Footnotes

1. James B. Conant, The American High School Today. New York: McGraw Hill, 1959.
2. For a discussion of the Constitutional problems posed by teacher witch hunts, see Erwin Griswald, The Fifth Amendment Today, Harvard University Press, 1957. A myriad of articles about the dangers of Communism appeared in education journals at this time. See, for example, Erling M. Hunt, "Teaching the Contrasts Between American Democracy and Soviet Communism," Teachers College Record, v. 55, 1953-54, or Gordon Hullfish, "Free Teachers in a Free Society," Teachers College Record, v. 57, 1955-56.
3. The Sputnik episode brought a spate of articles. See, for example, "Sputnik and American Education," Teachers College Record, v. 59, 1957-58.
4. In 1968, 79.6 percent of all bond issues were passed. In 1969, 49.5 percent passed. Source: Simon and Grant, Digest of Educational Statistics, 1971 edition, Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1972, p. 54, Table 73.
5. James Sundquist, Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1968.

6. George Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971, New York: Random House, 1972, v. 3.
7. The Harris Survey Yearbook of Public Opinion - 1970, New York: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1971, p. 59-62.
8. Bob Dylan, The Times They Are A -Changing, Columbia Records.
9. Norman Mailer, The Naked and The Dead, New York: Signet Books, 1948.
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